



Burnett, Paul C. (1983) *A self-concept enhancement program for children in the regular classroom*. Elementary School Guidance and Counselling, 18(2). pp. 100-108.

© Copyright 1983 [please consult the author]

Elementary School Guidance & Counseling®

December 1983 Vol. 18 No. 2



a self-concept enhancement program for children in the regular classroom

Paul C. Burnett

"After decades of paying lip service to educating the 'whole' child, schools are beginning to allocate time, money and energy toward developing programs and skills that affect the development of the total person" (Wirth, 1977, p. 33). The importance of developing each child to his full potential in all areas is being realized by educators. Within the affective domain, the development of self-concept is seen as an important goal for all children.

During the 1970s and continuing into the 1980s there has been a push to have children exposed to self-concept programs in the classroom with the teacher as a leader. Schulman, Ford, and Bush (1973) reported that a self-concept unit presented 502 children in 33 classrooms produced significant changes in the pupil's self-concept as measured by instruments devised by the authors. In 1970 the *Developing Understanding of Self and Others (DUSO)* Kit was devised (Dinkmeyer, 1970) for use in the classroom by teachers. The DUSO Kit is structured for implementation during 1 or 2 school years. Canfield and Wells (1976) contributed to the area of self-concept enhancement with their book, *One Hundred Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom*. Again, their ideas and activities are for use in the classroom with the teacher as leader.

It is not always possible for a classroom teacher to run a lengthy program for the whole class. Additionally, not all teachers have the expertise, training, or personal convictions necessary for running a self-enhancement program. An alternative could be for the school counselor to run small group sessions over a limited time. Much of the literature regarding small group self-enhancement or affective education refers to programs directed toward specific populations. The groups of children include first-grade repeaters (Fournier, 1977), seventh grade behavior problems (McCurdy, Ciucevich, & Walker, 1977), gifted children (Gumaer & Voorneveld, 1975), and children of divorce (Green, 1978). The results of these studies seem to indicate that children have more positive attitudes and feelings about themselves after being exposed to a self-enhancement program. All of these studies involved small groups of 3 to 12 children. Three of the programs consisted conducted by a school counselor, and each session usually lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Paul C. Burnett is a guidance officer with the Special Education Unit, Gatton, Queensland, Australia. The duties of a guidance officer in Queensland are similar to those of an American school counselor.

Despite these programs for specific populations, there has been little development, description, or research completed in the area of small group, limited session programs that can be conducted by the school counselor and that aim at enhancing the self-concept of children in the regular classroom. The following program is an attempt to do this.

PROCEDURE

A class of 28 seventh-grade children were administered the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (P-H)* (Piers & Harris, 1969). Out of this class 10 pairs were matched on the basis of their ranks on the P-H pretest. One member of each pair was randomly assigned to the treatment group, the other to the control group. By using this procedure, a range of self-concept levels was determined. The P-H was again administered to the whole class 1 week after completion of the treatment program. Parental permission was obtained for the children to be involved. The program was conducted by the guidance officer and consisted of 8 weekly sessions lasting approximately 1 hour. A regular meeting place was obtained at the school.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, OBJECTIVES, AND FORMAT

Various self-concept enhancement materials were reviewed, and it was decided to develop a theme for each session. Materials used in the program came from the following sources:

- Developing Understanding of Self and Others Kit 2* (Dinkmeyer, 1970)
- 100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom* (Canfield & Wells, 1976)
- Handbook of Classroom Activities for Developing Awareness in Primary Children* (Strohbehn, 1974)
- The Ungame* (1975)
- Homework activities developed by the author

The objectives of the program involved building up awareness in the children. "The Gestalt goals of awareness and awareness sharing are important affective life skills. Teaching these skills to children can be an important part of a preventive, developmental counseling program in an elementary school" (Remer & Schrader, 1978, 1981). The objectives of the program were increased awareness by the children of (a) their characteristics, (b) their feelings and how to deal with them, (c) themselves as individuals responsible for their thoughts and actions, (d) the existence of reasons for all behavior and consequences of that behavior, and (e) other people's feelings.

The program consisted of four parts:

1. a review of the previous week's session
2. a focusing story that introduced the theme
3. a discussion, associated activities, or role plays
4. homework activities

The discussion of the previous week's sessions served as an icebreaker so that the children became more comfortable speaking within the group. Each child was encouraged to express his or her thoughts and feelings about the most recent session. Homework activities were set to extend the children's participation in the program beyond the 1 hour per week and give the children the opportunity to investigate and explore the concepts discussed during the session. A discussion of the previous week's homework activity occurred before setting the homework for the next week. This discussion centered on how the children felt about completing the activity and what they had learned from it.

THE PROGRAM—INSTRUCTIONS FOR COUNSELORS

Session 1 : Theme—Personal Characteristics

STEP 1: Introduce yourself and explain that the group will meet together for eight weekly sessions. Ask the children to generate some rules that are appropriate to being involved in a group. Write the rules on a piece of paper and display them. If any of the following rules are not discussed, they should be proposed by the counselor.

- A. Be positive. Help others to feel good about themselves.
- B. Talk to everyone in the group. The leader is only one member of the group.
- C. Don't interrupt. Let others finish what they are saying.
- D. Tell how you feel about things.
- E. Listen to the way people feel about things.
- F. Be involved. Share and get involved with the ideas and feelings of other people (Dinkmeyer, 1970).

STEP 2: Read the story "I Wish I Were" from the DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 9–11), and discuss it under three general areas:

- A. The children's ideas and feelings about the story.
- B. Their ideas about other ways the characters might behave.
- C. How they might feel and act in a similar situation.

This story aims at helping the children know and accept themselves. Discuss this with them.

STEP 3: Discuss the word *characteristic* with the children. Ask the children to finish the statement, "One reason I am glad I am me is that. . . ." The children should be encouraged to tell something they like about themselves or something they do well. Discuss the following questions with the children:

- A. Why is it difficult to say good things about ourselves?
- B. Is there a difference between bragging and telling good things about yourself?

C. How does it make you feel to have others say good things about you?

HOMEWORK: Have the names of the group members in a box and ask the children to select one. Then ask the children to write down positive characteristics about that person before the next session. Also ask them to write down positive characteristics of themselves and their family.

Session 2 : Theme—What Are Feelings?

STEP 1: Review last week's session. Encourage each child to participate and contribute in this discussion.

STEP 2: Read the story "How Would You Feel" from DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 54–56) and discuss it with the children under the three general areas previously mentioned.

STEP 3: Complete the following activities, which encourage children to express and listen for feelings. Ask the children to generate words that describe feelings. Ask the children how they would feel if the following situations happened to them:

- A. I was playing with my new bike when someone shoved me off it.
- B. I went to all my friends' houses trying to find someone to play with, but they were all out.
- C. My father came home with tickets to take me to a special show.
- D. My neighbor broke my new toy on purpose.

Ask each child to tell a story about something that happened to him or her. The story should be associated with a feeling. Ask the rest of the group to try to pick the feeling associated with the story. Complete the activity "Controlling Our Feelings" (Strohbehn, 1974, pp. 12–13).

HOMEWORK: Discuss last week's homework activity. Homework activity for the week: Have the children practice listening for feelings when someone talks to them. Ask the children to identify and write down the associated feeling. Tell the children that it may help to ask themselves the question, "What is that person feeling?"

Session 3 : Theme—The Effects of Others and Negative Statements

STEP 1: Review last week's session.

STEP 2: Read the story "Nobody Cares" from DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 36–38) and discuss it with the children.

STEP 3: Complete the activity "I Am Lovable and Capable" (Canfield & Wells, 1976, pp. 91–93). Ask the children for ideas

for handling negative statements. Discuss these ideas and ask the other children for their opinions. Tell the children about "Positive Mantram—No matter what you do or say to me, I'm still a worthwhile person" (Canfield & Wells, 1976, p. 69) and "I messages—When you say negative things about me I feel you are trying to put me down." Discuss these methods for handling negative statements with the children.

HOMEWORK: Discuss last week's homework activity. Homework activity for the week: Ask the children to write down the killer or negative statements that people address to them. The children should also try to use "Positive Mantram" and "I messages" and report back on their effectiveness.

Session 4 : Theme—Individuality

STEP 1: Review the last session.

STEP 2: Read the story "Think for Yourself" DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 119–121) and discuss it with the children.

STEP 3: Activity—group discussion on overdependence. Read the following situations to the children and ask them to distinguish between times when children should ask for adult help and times when they should function on their own.

- A. A child comes to tell the teacher that a classmate has fallen on the playground and seems to be hurt.
- B. A child comes to tell the teacher that another child won't let him or her have a turn with the skipping rope.
- C. A child wants his mother to go with him to the public library to check out a book.
- D. A child wants her mother to come to a play her class is giving.
- E. A child's mother gives him or her lunch money on Mondays.
- F. A child's mother cleans the child's bedroom.
- G. A child's mother makes the child's bed and hangs up his or her clothes every day.
- H. A child's mother lays out the clothes that the child is supposed to wear everyday.
- I. A child's mother helps the child select clothes when they are shopping.

Ask the children if anyone would like to describe for group discussion a similar situation. Read the story "On Your Own" from DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 125–126) and discuss it with the children.

HOMEWORK: Discuss last week's homework activity. Homework activity for the week: Ask the children to say something positive

to someone each day for the next week. They should write down what they said and the effect it had on that person.

Session 5 : Theme—Trust and Belonging

STEP 1: Review the last session.

STEP 2: Read the story "You'll be Sorry" from DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 107–109) and discuss it with the children

STEP 3: Activity—The trust walk. Ask the children to select a partner. Tell them they now have the responsibility of looking after a blind person. You are to lead your blindfolded partner around the school ground. Change after 5 minutes and return. Discuss the following questions with the children:

- A. Were you able to trust your partner?
- B. Did you want to remove the blindfold at any time?
- C. Did you find it easier following or leading? What was easy or hard about it?
- D. Did you enjoy the exercise? What did you enjoy about it?

Elicit from the group a variety of reasons why children are sometimes rejected by groups. Suggestions might include: slow, too smart, dress differently, nationality, handicap, cheat, always want to be first, bossy, think of things that get others into trouble. Help the children evaluate the validity of their reasoning.

HOMEWORK: Discuss last week's homework activity. Homework activity for the week: The children are asked to write down how an excluded child can become a more effective group member.

Session 6 : Theme—Playing With Others

STEP 1: Review last week's session.

STEP 2: Introduce *The Ungame* (1975) to the children and discuss the rules. Have the children pair off and note down characteristics of their partners that they discovered as a result of playing the game. Discuss these characteristics at the end of the session.

HOMEWORK: Discuss last week's homework activity. Homework activity for the week: Ask the children to take an Ungame home and play it with their family.

Session 7 : Theme—Behavior Has Purpose

STEP 1: Discuss with the children their feelings about playing the Ungame at last week's session.

STEP 2: Read the story "Sick for a Reason" from DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 21–23) and discuss it with the children.

STEP 3: Discuss with the group the reasons why children misbehave. Ask the children for reasons and write them on the board.

STEP 4: Complete the "Causes of Behaviour Activity" from DUSO Kit 2, (Dinkmeyer, 1970, p. 26).

HOMEWORK: Ask the children how they felt about playing the Ungame with their family. Ask them what new things they discovered about their family members. Homework activity for the week: Ask the children to watch out for the causes of their behavior. They are to write down behaviors that they were chastised for and the reasons they behaved that way.

Session 8 : Theme—Cooperation and Goals

STEP 1: Review last week's session.

STEP 2: Read the story of "The Perfect Job" from DUSO Kit 2 (Dinkmeyer, 1970, pp. 207, 209) and discuss it with the children. Expand the story to talk about cooperation and the consequences of all behavior.

STEP 3: Give the children 10 minutes to complete the statement "I wish" or "I wonder." This hopefully will provide an opportunity for the children to tell their wishes or concerns without revealing their names. Pool the responses. Questions that could be generated from these replies:

- A. How do you suppose this person feels?
- B. How might we help this person make this wish come true or help with this problem?

STEP 4: Explain to the group that this is the last session. Ask the children for a short summary of what they gained from the program and then thank them for their cooperation.

EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

The mean P-H scores on the pretest were 58.0 for the treatment group and 57.8 for the control group. The mean scores on the posttest were 61.1 for the treatment and 56.7 for the control group. The difference between treatment and control group posttest scores were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Sign Test (Siegel, 1956) and with $T=3$ and $n=9$ yielded $p<0.001$ for a one-tailed test. The measured gain in self-concept was therefore significantly greater for the treatment group than for the control group. This would indicate that the self-concept of children in the regular classroom can be enhanced as a result of participating in a self-enhancement program.

This program has the following advantages:

1. It was completed in eight sessions.
2. Each child was always involved because of the small size of the group.
3. It does not require the teacher to be involved although it does not restrict their involvement.

Although the program was presented to seventh grade children, other grade levels could participate in this or similar programs.

The results obtained in this study would indicate that involvement in self-concept enhancement programs would be beneficial for all children. However, further research and investigation is necessary to ascertain more fully the effects of such programs.

REFERENCES

- Canfield, J., & Wells, H. (1976). *One hundred ways to enhance self-concept in the classroom*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Dinkmeyer, D. (1970). *Developing understanding of self and others, kit 2*. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.
- Fournier, M. J. (1977). A self-enhancement activity group for first grade repeaters. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 11, 267-277.
- Green, B. J. (1978). Helping children of divorce: A multimodal approach. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 13, 31-45.
- Gumaer, J., & Voorneveld, R. (1975). Affective education with gifted children. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 10, 86-95.
- McCurdy, B., Ciucevich, M. T., & Walker, B.A. (1977). Human relations training with seventh grade boys identified as behavior problems. *School Counselor*, 24, 248-252.
- Piers, E. V., & Harris, D. B. (1969). *Manual for the Piers-Harris children's self-concept scale*. Nashville, TN: Counselor Recordings and Tests.
- Remer, P., & Schrader, L. (1978). *Gestalt approach to classroom counseling: A model for the counselor and the teacher*. Lexington: University of Kentucky.
- Remer, P., & Schrader, L. (1981). Gestalt approach to classroom guidance. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 16, 15-23.
- Schulman, J., Ford, B., & Bush, P. (1973). A classroom program to improve self-concept. *Psychology in the Schools*, 10, 481-487.
- Siegel, S. (1956). *Nonparametric Statistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Strohbehn, J. (1974). *Handbook of classroom activities for developing awareness in primary children*. Nevada, IA: Nevada Community School District.
- Ungame. (1975). Artarmon, N.S.W., Australia: John Sands Pty. Ltd.
- Wirth, S. (1977). Effects of a multifaceted reading program on self-concept. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling*, 12, 33-40.

